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Back to the Past: A timeline of press freedom

By: CMFR Staff

Posted on: September 1, 2007, 11:27 am

A timeline of press freedom

Back to the Past

By Jose Bimbo F. Santos and Melanie Y. Pinlac

IN TODAY'S fast-moving world, 35 years can be a very short time. It was not long ago that Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and put a stop to freedom of the press. But not many Filipinos remember that anymore. And that is why we look back at what have transpired since then. In doing so, we may come out with a chilling realization: how close—how dangerously close—we are to the past.

September 21, 1972 – Ferdinand Marcos signs Proclamation No. 1081 placing the country under martial law.

September 22, 1972 – Through Letter of Instruction no. 1, Marcos orders the closure of media establishments like Manila Times; Daily Mirror; Manila Chronicle; Manila Daily Bulletin; Philippine Daily Express; Philippines Herald; Philippine Free Press, Graphic; and the Nation as well as wire agencies.

September 23, 1972 – Media and opposition personalities known to be critical against Marcos are taken to military camps for investigation and detention. The series of interrogation of the media by the military intelligence begins.

September 25, 1972 – The Department of Public Information (DPI) issues Order No. 1 requiring all media publications to get a clearance from the DPI, and Order No.2 which prohibits printers "from producing any form of publication for mass dissemination without permission from DPI." On this day, the Philippine Daily Express restarts publication.

October 28, 1972 – Marcos issue Presidential Decree (PD) 33 which "penalizes the printing, possession, and distribution of leaflets and other materials, and even graffiti which 'undermine the integrity of the government.'"

November 2, 1972 – Marcos issues PD No. 36 canceling the franchises and permits of all mass media facilities allegedly trying to topple his government. The decree creates the Mass Media Council which has the power to grant certificates of authority to newspapers, radio, and TV.

January 6, 1973 – Marcos issues PD 90 penalizing rumor-mongering. Rumor, according to the decree, is "false news and information and gossip which undermines the stability of government."

May 11, 1973 – Marcos issues PD 191 abolishing the Mass Media Council and creating the Media Advisory Council.

1974 – The Foreign Correspondents' Association of the Philippines is formed to protect the rights of journalists working for foreign agencies. Like local journalists, foreign correspondents undergo censorship. In an interview with PJR Reports, former New York Times correspondent Alice Colet Villadolid says they go to Malacañang everyday to have their articles checked and approved by the Office of the Press Secretary.

November 9, 1974 – PD 576 abolishes the Media Advisory Council and the Bureau of Standards for Mass Media. But, on November 11 of the same year, Marcos authorized the organization of regulatory councils for print and broadcast media through PD 576-A. The Philippine Council for Print Media and the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster sa Pilipinas were formed.

February 3, 1976 – Marcos issues PD 885 forbidding the creation of “subversive” organizations. It included “preparing documents, leaflets and any other types of publication, and advising and counseling members of “subversive” organizations” as among the punishable acts. The penalty for crimes against public order is increased through PD 942.

January 28, 1977 – Marcos issues PD 1079, a decree “Revising and consolidating all laws and decrees regulating the publication of judicial notices, advertisements for public biddings, notices of auction sales, and other similar notices.”

June 11, 1978 – Marcos issues PD No. 1498 or the National Security Code.

September 12, 1980 – Marcos issues PD No 1737 or the Public Order Act. This “empowered him to issue orders as he may deem necessary” in order to clamp down on “subversive publications or other media of mass communication” and “ban or regulate the holding of entertainment (or exhibitions) deemed ‘detrimental to the national interest.’” Under this, he was also “empowered to order the preventive detention of persons and to prohibit the wearing of certain uniforms or emblems.”

October 8, 1980 – Marcos issues PD No. 727 making “unlawful the malicious dissemination of false information.”

January 17, 1981 – Marcos issues Proclamation No. 2045 “lifting” martial law.

January 23, 1981 – The government abolishes the print and broadcast media councils. The right to publish without having to obtain prior license was restored.

March 9, 1982 – Marcos issues Letter of Instruction No. 1211. Called the Presidential Commitment Order, the presidential issuance allows the “preventive detention” of persons for crimes mentioned in PD No. 2045.

December 2, 1982 – Marcos orders the seizure of We Forum after it came out with a series exposing his fake medals.

July 21, 1983 – The Presidential Commitment Order was replaced by Preventive Detention Action. Marcos issues PD 1875 repealing the Public Order Act, and PD 1876 repealing the National Security Code. 4

July 25, 1983 – Marcos issues PD 1835 or the Anti-Subversion Law of 1981, “increasing the penalties for membership in subversive organizations from life imprisonment to death.”

August 20, 1983 – Women Writers in Media Now hold a consultation on press freedom.

August 21, 1983 – Former senator Benigno Aquino Jr. is assassinated upon his return to Manila.

September 29, 1983 – Pro-nine Times were seized after it published a story implicating high government and milita (https://cmfr-phil.org) sassinatio of Ninoy Aquino. (about) Q

Mid-1985 – The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists announces that a total of 12 journalists were killed since 1984. The National Press Club, on the other hand, says that 19 were killed and one has been missing since 1976.

February 7, 1986 – Snap elections are held.

February 22, 1986 – People Power begins and ends peacefully after four days.

February 25, 1986 – Marcos flees to Hawaii. Corazon Aquino takes power.

February 28, 1986 – The Aquino government issues Executive Order (EO) No. 1 creating the Presidential Commission on Good Government which was tasked to go after the alleged ill-gotten wealth of the Marcos family.

March 2, 1986 – President Aquino lifts the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus.

July 16, 1986 – EO No. 29 repealed PD No. 33, the decree “Penalizing the Printing, Possession, Distribution and Circulation of Certain Leaflets, Handbills and Propaganda Materials and the Inscribing or Designing of Graffiti.”

December 17, 1986 – Malacañang issues E.O. No. 92 expanding the responsibility and authority of the Office of the Press Secretary. Through this order, the Bureau of National and Foreign Information and all its subsidiary offices, the Radio and Television Malacañang, the Presidential Press Staff and its sub-offices, the People’s Television 4, and the Radyo ng Bayan are placed under the control of the OPS.

December 24, 1986 – The Aquino government forms the Philippine Information Agency after the abolition of the Office of Media Affairs.

1987 – The Philippine Press Institute is re-established after its operation was halted during martial law.

June 5, 1987 – President Aquino issues EO No. 187 repealing the Marcos-issued PD 38 (“Amending Articles 135, 136, 137, 138, 140, 142, 177, 178 and 179 of The Revised Penal Code”), 942 (“Amending the Provisions of the Revised Penal Code on Crimes Against Public Order), 1735 (“Imposing Additional Penalties for Rebellion, Insurrection, Sedition, and Subversion Committed Within or Outside Philippine Territory”), 1834 (“Increasing The Penalties For The Crime of Rebellion, Sedition, and Related Crimes, and Amending For This Purpose Articles 135, 136, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 146 and 147 Of The Revised Penal Code and Adding Section 142-B Thereto”), 1974 (“Amending Presidential Decree No. 1834”), and 1996 (“Further Amending PD No. 1834 as Amended”) and Articles 142-a and 142-b of the Revised Penal Code.

October 1987 – President Aquino files a libel suit against journalist Luis Beltran for writing in his column that she “hid under the bed” while government troops were battling mutineers in August 1987. On October 22, 1992, Beltran and Soliven were convicted of libel, but the decision was reversed by the Court of Appeals on July 12, 1993.

1988 – The PPI and the National Press Club adopt the Journalists’ Code of Ethics.

December 3-4, 1989 – The National Telecommunications Council orders the closure of two radio stations, dzEC and dyLA, for “airing rebel propaganda and disinformation in violation of franchise rule.” The stations provided space and time to military rebels who staged a coup on December 1989. The orders were lifted

December 11 and 13, 1989 – In the same year, the NTC issued Memorandum circular no. 22-89 (https://cmfr-phil.org/about) revising Memorandum circular no. 1-89 governing program standards of the broadcast media," but it was later lifted.

December 6, 1989 – The Aquino government declares a state of National Emergency due to attempts to topple her government.

July 5, 1991 – Republic Act (RA) 7079 or the "Campus Journalism Act of 1991" is enacted.

October 21, 1991 – The Philippine National Police issues a secret directive. It aims to form a media research project, "Oplan Malunggay," to classify which mass media personalities and institutions are friendly or critical to the agency. On December 13, the Manila Chronicle runs a series on the directive. The PNP, however, denies that such an order was issued.

September 22, 1992 – President Fidel V. Ramos signs RA 7636 repealing RA 1700, otherwise known as the Anti-Subversion law. RA 1700 was signed into law on June 20, 1957 by then President Carlos P. Garcia to combat communism, which was popular during the Cold War, declaring groups like the "Hukbalahap" as illegal. The law was also used to curb criticism against the government, and other published materials during the Marcos dictatorship that discussed the revolution.

March 9, 1999 – President Joseph Estrada files a P101-million libel suit against The Manila Times for the paper's Feb. 16 banner story which described him as an "unwitting ninong (godfather)" to a P17-billion power contract between an Argentine firm and the National Power Corp. The Times published a front-page apology by publisher Robina Gokongwei-Pe on April 8. The following day, Estrada announced the withdrawal of his libel suit against the newspaper. The apology led to the resignation of editors Chit Estella, Booma Cruz, Ed Lingao and Joel Gaborni. (Estella


July 10, 1999 – Movie advertisements withdraw from the Philippine Daily Inquirer, two days after Estrada met with his businessmen friends and film industry bigwigs. Other government institutions and state-run companies also joined the ad boycott, which lasted until late November. The Inquirer's palace reporter was excluded from media's meetings with Estrada. Then Press Secretary Rodolfo Reyes cited "the Inquirer's very biased reporting" as reason for the ban.

July 22, 1999 – Media report the sale of The Manila Times to lawyer Katrina Legarda and businessman Reghis Romero III for P20 million. The next day, the Times announced that it was ceasing publication. When it reopened, the new owner was identified as Mark Jimenez, a known ally of Estrada.

September 15, 1999 – The Supreme Court reverses the Manila Regional Trial Court and the Court Appeals' conviction for libel of Rodolfo Vasquez, spokesperson for 38 families who were evicted from the Tondo Foreshore area in 1986. Vasquez was sued by barangay captain Jaime Olmeda, who was accused of landgrabbing and other illegal activities. The high court, in a landmark decision, established that truth is a defense against libel.

September 6, 2003 – Juan "Jun" Pala, is assassinated in Davao. He was the seventh journalist casualty this year, a number not seen since the 1980s.

September 10, 2003 – Unesco Director-General Koïchiro Matsuda condemns the killing of journalists in the Philippines.

December 2003 – The Bru:  eedom organization International Federation of Journalists releases its annual report, (https://cmfr-phil.org) (about) ranking with Colombia as the most dangerous country for journalists next to Iraq.

2004 – The killing of journalists continues, with the country figuring prominently in the annual reports of international press freedom organizations that list the most dangerous places for journalists worldwide. There were 11 reported cases of journalist killings at the end of 2004. Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) research later indicated that there were actually 15 killings, 8 of which were work-related. The Arroyo government also created Task Force Newsmen to address the crisis.

April 1, 2005 – The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines reports the existence of a military document titled, “Knowing the Enemy,” which identified them along with the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) as two of several “fronts” of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People’s Army (NPA). The document was reportedly prepared by the Intelligence Service of the Philippines of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Then Armed Forces spokesman Brig. Gen. Jose Honrado however said that the document merely showed “organizations which are targets of infiltration by the CPP-NPA.”

September 26, 2005 – President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo issues EO 464 prohibiting senior executive and military officials from appearing in Congress without the President’s permission. The executive order was issued in the wake of the “Hello Garci” controversy and a week after National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales appeared in a Senate hearing regarding the P50-million contract of the government with the Washington-based law firm Venable LLP as lobbying consultants. The timing of its release was thus seen as part of the attempt to prevent information on both issues from reaching the public. EO 464 was partly upheld by the Supreme Court in a decision on April 2006. But the Court noted that “[executive] privilege being, by definition, an exemption from the obligation to disclose information, in this case to Congress, the necessity must be of such high degree as to outweigh the public interest in enforcing that obligation in a particular case.”

November 29, 2005 – Judge Ramon Codilla of the Cebu City Regional Trial Court finds Police Officer Guillermo Wapile guilty of killing journalist Edgar Damalerio who was murdered on May 13, 2002.

February 24, 2006 – Arroyo issues Presidential Proclamation 1017, placing the country under a state of national emergency. The administration also issues guidelines for the media prohi-biting news and commentaries that are “subversive” and warns that the government was closely monitoring the press.

February 25, 2006 – The police raid the office of the Daily Tribune, getting copies of news reports and photos from the publication’s editorial office “because it was a possible source of destabilization materials.”

March 6, 2006 – President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo issues EO 511 creating a communications group that will “guide, integrate, and supervise the public information activities, including advertisements, of all departments and agencies of the executive branch of government, including government-owned and -controlled corporations.” EO 511 raised alarm among the media because of its resemblance to former President Estrada’s attempt to control the press by controlling government ad placements.

May 3, 2006 – The Supreme Court (SC) declares the government raid on the Daily Tribune illegal and constituting “plain censorship.” While also declaring the constitutionality of Presidential Proclamation 1017 in so far as upholding Arroyo’s power to declare a state of national emergency is concerned, it ruled as

media the Arroyo government privately owned media.



itself the authority to issue decrees and raid or take over (https://cmfr-phil.org)

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May 13, 2006 – Interior secretary Ronaldo V. Puno orders the creation of Task Force Usig to investigate the killing of members of militant groups, government officials, and journalists.

August 13, 2006 – Amnesty International (AI) says the Arroyo administration failed “to fulfill its obligation to protect the right to life of every individual under its jurisdiction, regardless of the political affiliation of those targeted.” AI adds: “No one deserves to die for his political affiliation. It should be a deep embarrassment to the government that people in the Philippines cannot freely exercise their rights of political expression and association.”

August 21, 2006 – GMA issues Administrative Order No. 157 creating a five-man commission headed by former SC Justice Jose Melo to investigate, examine policy matters, recommend reforms and consolidate efforts to mete out justice on cases of extrajudicial killings.

September 18, 2006 – Christopher Warren, International Federation of Journalists president, describes as “outrageous” the number of libel suits (10 suits against 45 journalists) filed by Jose Miguel “Mike” Arroyo, husband of Mrs. Arroyo, against the press.

September 12, 2006 – The Melo Commission starts its probe into the spate of killings of activist leaders and journalists.

October 6, 2006 – Gerry Cabayag, Randy Grecia, and Estanislao Bismanos are convicted by Judge Eric Menchavez of Cebu City Regional Trial Court for the March 24, 2005 killing of Marlene Esperat in Tacurong, Sultan Kudarat.

December 28, 2006 – Journalists and press organizations, including the CMFR, the PCIJ, and the Daily Tribune, filed a class action suit in response to the numerous libel suits that presidential spouse Mike Arroyo filed against members of the press.

January 22, 2007 – The Melo Commission submits its report to President Arroyo. It says, among other things, that while the AFP does not have a policy for the illegal liquidation of persons, “there is certainly evidence pointing the finger of suspicion at some elements and personalities in the Armed Forces, in particular Gen. Palparan, as responsible for an undetermined number of killings, by allowing, tolerating, and even encouraging the killings.”

February 11, 2007 – Philip Alston, UN Special Rap-porteur for extrajudicial killings, arrives for a ten-day fact-finding mission. Alston was accompanied by UN experts Ulrich Grams, who had investigated war crimes in Bosnia, and William Abresch, who had investigated human rights violations in Chechnya.

February 15, 2007 – Both the EU and UN Special Rapporteur Philip Alston have asked the Palace for a copy of the Melo report. Malacañang however refused to furnish the EU and UN a copy, saying that the report was still incomplete.

February 21, 2007 – Alston releases a preliminary statement at the end of his ten-day investigation, saying that the Armed Forces of the Philippines is in “a state of denial” regarding its role in extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations.

February 22, 2007 – Mrs. Arroyo finally releases the Melo report to the public.

March 5, 2007 – The Supreme Court (https://cmfr-phil.org/about) designated 99 regional trial courts as special tribunals for the cases of extrajudicial killings in 90 days and warning that delays would be punished.

March 6, 2007 – President Arroyo signs into law RA 9372, also known as the Human Security Act of 2007 or the Anti-Terror Law.

March 12, 2007 – The UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva starts its investigation into extrajudicial killings in Philippines. In the US, Eric John, US deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, tells a US Senate sub-committee that Mrs. Arroyo must bear the blame for the increasing attacks on people speaking out against her administration.

March 25, 2007 – The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands finds Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and the Philippine government guilty of "crimes against humanity" in connection with charges of extrajudicial killings, abductions and disappearances, massacres, and torture committed against civilians.

March 26, 2007 – Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales says the extrajudicial killings and other abuses that have occurred during Mrs. Arroyo's six-year presidency are a "mere speck of blood" compared to the number of political murders and human rights violations committed during the term of Ferdinand Marcos.

March 27, 2007 – United Nations Special Rapporteur Philip Alston presents to the UN his findings regarding the state of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines and accuses the government of "passivity, bordering on an abdication of responsibility" in the matter of protecting human rights.

April 20, 2007 – President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo issues EO 608 restricting public and media access to official information. The EO creates the National Security Clearance System to "protect and ensure the integrity and sanctity" of classified information against "enemies of the state."

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See also:


Marcos and the Press (http://www.cmfr-phil.org/2007/09/01/marcos-and-the-press/?preview=true&preview_id=690&preview_nonce=139a2e40da)

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Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility

Rm 200-B Center for Community Services Hall, Social Development Complex

Fr. Arrupe Road, Ateneo de Manila University,

Katipunan Avenue, Loyola Heights, Quezon City 1108 Philippines

Tel: (+63 2) 426-6001 loc. 4653

E-mail: info@cmfr-phil.org

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